

# Open in prayer

## Read Ruth 1

<sup>1</sup> During the time of the judges, there was a famine in the land. A man left Bethlehem in Judah with his wife and two sons to stay in the territory of Moab for a while. <sup>2</sup> The man's name was Elimelech, and his wife's name was Naomi. The names of his two sons were Mahlon and Chilion. They were Ephrathites from Bethlehem in Judah. They entered the fields of Moab and settled there. <sup>3</sup> Naomi's husband, Elimelech, died, and she was left with her two sons. <sup>4</sup> Her sons took Moabite women as their wives: one was named Orpah and the second was named Ruth. After they lived in Moab for about ten years, <sup>5</sup> both Mahlon and Chilion also died, and the woman was left without her two children and without her husband.

<sup>6</sup> She and her daughters-in-law set out to return from the territory of Moab, because she had heard in Moab that the Lord had paid attention to his people's need by providing them with food. <sup>7</sup> She left the place where she had been living, accompanied by her two daughters-in-law, and travelled along the road leading back to the land of Judah.

<sup>8</sup> Naomi said to them, 'Each of you go back to your mother's home. May the Lord show kindness to you as you have shown to the dead and to me. <sup>9</sup> May the Lord grant each of you rest in the house of a new husband.' She kissed them, and they wept loudly.

<sup>10</sup> They said to her, 'We insist on returning with you to your people.'

<sup>11</sup> But Naomi replied, 'Return home, my daughters. Why do you want to go with me? Am I able to have any more sons who could become your husbands? <sup>12</sup> Return home, my daughters. Go on, for I am too old to have another husband. Even if I thought there was still hope for me to have a husband tonight and to bear sons, <sup>13</sup> would you be willing to wait for them to grow up? Would you restrain yourselves from remarrying? No, my daughters, my life is much too bitter for you to share, because the Lord's hand has turned against me.' <sup>14</sup> Again they wept loudly, and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her. <sup>15</sup> Naomi said, 'Look, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods. Follow your sister-in-law.'

<sup>16</sup> But Ruth replied:

Don't plead with me to abandon you  
or to return and not follow you.

For wherever you go, I will go,  
and wherever you live, I will live;  
your people will be my people,  
and your God will be my God.

<sup>17</sup> Where you die, I will die,  
and there I will be buried.

May the Lord punish me,  
and do so severely,

if anything but death separates you and me.

<sup>18</sup> When Naomi saw that Ruth was determined to go with her, she stopped talking to her.

<sup>19</sup> The two of them travelled until they came to Bethlehem. When they entered Bethlehem, the whole town was excited about their arrival and the local women exclaimed, 'Can this be Naomi?'

<sup>20</sup> 'Don't call me Naomi. Call me Mara,' she answered, 'for the Almighty has made me very bitter. <sup>21</sup> I went away full, but the Lord has brought me back empty. Why do you call me Naomi, since the Lord has opposed me, and the Almighty has afflicted me?'

<sup>22</sup> So Naomi came back from the territory of Moab with her daughter-in-law Ruth the Moabitess. They arrived in Bethlehem at the beginning of the barley harvest.

## Introduction

Å I have drunk deeply from the cup of bitterness. ●●●

Å Bitterness is the toxic sediment left behind when expectations die and resentment settles in the soul. ● I have experienced this. ● It eats away at your joy until everything you see is filtered through the lens of what you lost. ●●

Å For me bitterness plays itself out at night, where I replay over and over again what would have been. What could have been. What should have been. ● I sit in the dark, wrestling with a sense of abandonment in my soul. ●●

Å The problem is bitterness isolates me. Convinces me that my pain is unique. That God has forgotten me. That despair is my only honest response. ●●

R I have discovered an antidote to this soul poison. ● When the world crumbles, we must Cling to the Covenant Companion who has overcome all bitter despair. ●●

R We see this trajectory in the opening chapter of Ruth. This morning, we will trace this journey through five distinct movements. First, the ruin of human logic in Ruth 1:1-5. ● Second, the separation of the heart in Ruth 1:6-15. ● Third, the climax of sovereign devotion in Ruth 1:16-17. ● Fourth, the blindness of bitter despair in Ruth 1:18-21. ● Finally, the dawn of providential hope in Ruth 1:22. ●●

R Where does this corrosive bitterness begin? ● It starts when we try to navigate a broken world by our own wit. Turn with me to Ruth 1. Let us look first at the ruin of human logic. ●●

## 1) The ruin of human logic (Ruth 1:1-5)

R <sup>1</sup> During the time of the judges, Israel spiralled into civil war. Ethical anarchy. Spiritual decay. Every man did what was right in his own eyes. • So God sent them a famine in the land. As a covenantal judgment. • God had warned them in Deuteronomy 28. If they rebelled, the heavens above their head would be bronze and the earth beneath iron. Famine was the heavy hand of God pressing down on His rebellious people. • Yet, instead of repenting, one man chose the path of human logic. Elimelech looked at the drought, looked at his family, and decided to flee. His scheme prioritised temporary physical survival over faithful covenantal fidelity. Elimelech chose sight over faith. ••

Å Here's irony. • Elimelech left Bethlehem in Judah with his wife and two sons. • Bethlehem means *The House of Bread*. Judah means *Praise*. But *The House of Bread* is empty. And the place of *Praise* falls silent. • So Elimelech journeys to the territory of Moab, Israel's historical enemy. • The text says he went to stay for a while. A brief planned compromise. A temporary escape until the crisis passed. • <sup>2</sup> The man's name was Elimelech, which means *My God is King*. And his wife's name was Naomi, meaning *Pleasant*. Their sons bear the marks of the dark times they were born into. Mahlon means *Sickly*. Chilion means *Vanishing*. • They entered the fields of Moab and settled there. Their temporary stay became a permanent dwelling as complacency set in. ••

Å But human schemes fracture. Compromise yields poor harvest. • <sup>3</sup> Naomi's husband, Elimelech, died, and she was left with her two sons. <sup>4</sup> Her sons took pagan Moabite women as their wives, Orpah and Ruth. • Then, after ten years, the final blow falls. <sup>5</sup> Both Mahlon and Chilion also die. And the woman was left without her two children and without her husband. • In a foreign land. Old. Barren. And empty. ••

~ Can you imagine a sea captain who decides his ship's anchor is too heavy. And the rules of naval navigation too restrictive. • You'd call him a fool if he cut the anchor and steered the ship by his own instincts. Eventually a storm would drive his ship into the jagged rocks of a reef. •• That is human logic apart from God. A shipwreck of our own making. ••

Å In Ruth 1:1-5, a faithless human scheme led to disaster. And Naomi is left empty. Barren. Old. In a foreign land. Without hope. ••

R What will Naomi do after human wisdom crumbles into dust? • She turns from Moab's graves and starts to make her way back home. • Which brings us to our second point. The separation of the heart. •••

## 2) The separation of the heart (Ruth 1:6-15)

Å Whispered hope reaches Moab. <sup>6</sup> The Lord had paid attention to his people's need by providing them with food. • The famine is over. His covenantal judgment has lifted. • So Naomi <sup>7</sup> left the place where she had been living, accompanied by her two daughters-in-law, and travelled along the road leading back to the land of Judah. It is a 120km journey. But you can imagine the physical distance could not compare with the emotional weight of each step. • Three widows walking toward an uncertain future. • One old and broken. • Two young and grieving. ••

Å Then, Naomi stops and turns. And says <sup>8</sup> go back to your mother's home. • She prays that the Lord may show kindness. And <sup>9</sup> the Lord may grant each of you a new husband. • She kissed them, and they wept loudly. • But the girls insist on returning with her. • So Naomi presses even harder. Why do you want to go with me? Am I able to have any more sons who could become your husbands? No, my daughters, my life is much too bitter for you to share, because the Lord's hand has turned against me. • In the ancient world, a childless widow stood on the lowest social rung. Without a father, husband, or son, a woman had no economic security, no legal standing, and no physical protection. Naomi faces destitution. Her lament is directed at the Lord whose hand she feels has crushed her. ••

Å Her words pierce their hearts, and <sup>14</sup> they wept loudly. • So, Orpah kissed her mother-in-law goodbye. She turned her back, walking away. • But Ruth clung to her. • Naomi tries one final time to push her away. <sup>15</sup> Look, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods. Follow her. • To stay with Naomi is to choose poverty. Foreignness. Exile. • Human logic dictates Ruth must follow Orpah back to the security of Moab. If she chooses to stay with an old, barren widow, Ruth is signing her own economic death warrant. But Ruth is not motivated to go to Israel to find a husband. She is motivated by devotion to Naomi. She's entirely self-sacrificial. • Ruth clung to Naomi. That word, clung, is the same word used in Genesis for the way a husband cleaves to his wife. Ruth locks her life to Naomi. And she refuses to let go. ••

P On that road, a line is drawn. Orpah walks back to her security, her people, and her gods. Ruth cleaves to a broken, bitter widow. • Naomi's despair is on full display, but in the midst of it, God has provided a companion for her. ••

R What does self-sacrificial devotion sound like? • Listen to Ruth's words, the third point. The climax of sovereign devotion. ••

### 3) The climax of sovereign devotion (Ruth 1:16-17)

P Ruth's vow shakes the dirt of Moab from her feet. She refuses to turn back, and makes a covenant oath. • <sup>16</sup> Don't plead with me to abandon you or to return and not follow you. For wherever you go, I will go, and wherever you live, I will live. • Ruth binds her geography to Naomi. • She rejects the fields of her youth and hitches her future to Bethlehem. ••

P And she binds her identity to Naomi. • Your people will be my people. • In the ancient Near East, you belonged to your tribe. Your community defined your protection, your legal standing, your existence. • Ruth tears up her ID document. She chooses to become a despised immigrant in Israel. ••

m And she binds her theology to Naomi. • Your God will be my God. • A total transfer of allegiance. • Gods were tied to territories. Chemosh ruled Moab. Yahweh ruled Israel. • Ruth isn't just changing her address. She is changing her altar to take refuge under the wings of Yahweh. ••

P Ruth binds her end to Naomi. • <sup>17</sup> Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. • In antiquity, the greatest dread was to be buried away from your ancestral plot. By binding her corpse to the soil of Israel, Ruth guarantees she will never return to Moab. She chooses permanent exile. ••

~ She seals her promises with a curse. • May the Lord punish me, and do so severely, if anything but death separates you and me. • Invoking the sacred covenant name, Yahweh. • Using language that mimics a marriage bond. • Moab was Israel's enemy. Explicitly excluded from entering the assembly. Elimelech abandoned Bethlehem because he lacked faith in his King. Human logic resulted in death. • Ruth, a cursed Moabitess, abandons her homeland to cling to Naomi, swearing a blood oath to Yahweh. • So God will use this pagan convert to shame the faithlessness of Israel. ••

~ When an industrial torch welds two metal plates together, the pieces fuse into a single sheet. You can't pull them apart. The metal itself will tear before the weld breaks. • That is covenant commitment. It is not a modern contract with an escape clause. It is a fusion of destinies. ••

P Ruth makes a binding covenant vow to Naomi in life and death. And the Lord provides a covenant companion to overcome bitter despair. • Hope walks alongside Naomi, even if she cannot see it. ••

R So how will this broken heart respond? • Our fourth point. The blindness of bitter despair. •••

#### 4) The blindness of bitter despair (Ruth 1:18-21)

Å Naomi looks at Ruth. She can see she's not going anywhere. So, Naomi <sup>18</sup> stopped talking to her. • 100kms of heavy, unresolved silence. The two women walk next to each other, yet are worlds apart. Ruth has just promised her life and identity to Naomi. Naomi responds by ignoring her. Despair has closed her ears, locked her jaw, and broken her heart. ••

Å <sup>19</sup> The two of them travelled until they came to Bethlehem. The news ripples through the gates. The whole town was excited about their arrival. • The local women gather around, squinting at the worn travellers. They exclaim, Can this be Naomi? • They remember Naomi as the stable, prosperous wife who left with her husband Elimelech a decade ago. Now they see a gaunt, weathered widow who looks like she has survived an execution. Her physical transformation is devastating. ••

Ø Naomi snaps at their greeting. <sup>20</sup> 'Don't call me Naomi. Call me Mara, for the Almighty has made me very bitter. • Naomi means Pleasant. Mara means Bitter. She wants a name to match her bleeding soul. • <sup>21</sup> I went away full, but the Lord has brought me back empty. Why do you call me Naomi, since the Lord has opposed me, and the Almighty has afflicted me? • This is courtroom language. Naomi puts Yahweh on trial. She claims God has stepped into the witness stand. And is testifying against her. Acting as her legal adversary. • She spits out her grief. Ignoring the living monument to covenant loyalty standing next to her. Ruth is right there. Despair has made Naomi functionally blind. ••

□ Bitterness is a toxic, caustic acid. If you pour it into a silver cup, it doesn't just sit there. It eats through the lining. Corrodes the metal. Until the vessel is destroyed. • Bitterness corrupts from the inside out. It distorts your memories of the past and completely blinds you to the gifts of the present. It turns your focus entirely inward until you can only see your own wounds. ••

on Naomi and Ruth arrive in Bethlehem, but their homecoming is choked with grief rather than celebrated in joy. • Naomi feels entirely abandoned by Yahweh. But she is not alone. God's grand provision stands at her side. ••

R Will the dark courtroom of Naomi's mind have the final word? • Our fifth point. The dawn of providential hope. •••

## 5) The dawn of providential hope (Ruth 1:22)

P <sup>22</sup> So Naomi came back from the territory of Moab with her daughter-in-law Ruth the Moabitess. • If you only listened to Naomi's tear-soaked side of the story, you'd think this was a tragedy. • But Naomi's despair will not have the final say. Because her vision is distorted. • Ruth 1 began with Naomi in Moab, a land representing separation from God. Now she is back in Bethlehem. Naomi claimed she returned empty. But she is accompanied by her faithful daughter-in-law. Ruth 1 began with the death of her covenant partner. Now she stands with a covenant companion. • Human logic has completely miscalculated the situation. Sovereign grace has been with her. ••

P And here is the second providential twist. They arrived in Bethlehem at the beginning of the barley harvest. • Ruth 1 began with Elimelech looking at a dry, dusty field and fleeing because there was a famine. Now Naomi walks back and her feet touch soil that is bursting with life. She arrives precisely when the scythes are hitting the grain. *The House of Bread* is being refilled. • She thinks she is facing an ending. God is staging a beginning. Human logic has miscalculated the situation. Providential care has been guiding her steps. ••

ð Imagine a man lost in a pitch-black forest during a violent, freezing thunderstorm. He is shivering, bruised, and convinced he will die before dawn. • He focuses on the biting cold, the howling wind, and the jagged rocks ripping his shoes. He is so consumed by the horror of the storm that he fails to notice a faint, warm light flickering directly ahead. He cannot see that the path beneath his feet is leading him straight toward a rescue cabin. • When we go through hell, our pain clouds our field of vision. We become blind to the good gifts God positions right in front of our faces. The rescue vehicle has arrived, while the passenger is still weeping. ••

P Naomi and Ruth's arrival in Bethlehem coincides perfectly with the beginning of the harvest. The Lord has provided a covenant companion to overcome Naomi's bitter despair. • Naomi is drowning in her own bitterness. Yet Yahweh has already filled the fields with food and filled the road with a loyal, self-sacrificial companion. ••

R How does a story about ancient grain fields lift the weight of our modern despair? • We must look to the gospel. ••

## Connect to the gospel

P The Lord has provided a covenant companion to overcome bitter despair. • Naomi stands knee-deep in barley, blind to the gift of God standing right next to her. The fields are full, and her companion is faithful. God has sovereignly orchestrated the reversal of her ruin. ••

∂ This ancient reversal whispers of a much grander rescue. Without the gospel of Jesus Christ, this text becomes nothing more than a moral lesson. • We are Naomi in this story. The ones who willfully alienated ourselves in a pagan land, choosing the broken logic of the world over the living God. • We are by nature spiritually bankrupt, ruined, and justly crushed under the weight of covenantal judgment. As Paul writes in Ephesians 2:12-13, we were at that time without Christ, excluded from the citizenship of Israel, and foreigners to the covenants of promise, without hope and without God in the world. ••

P Yet, even while weeping in our self-made exile, the sovereign Lord provided an ultimate, unexpected covenant companion. • Jesus Christ did not leave us in our ruin. He crossed eternity, entered our darkness, and took our bitter judgment upon himself. He became the cursed outsider for us, hanging naked on a Roman cross, pouring out his own blood to buy us back. • He didn't just walk beside us in our misery, he conquered it through his glorious resurrection. So in Jesus, you who were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ. Through Jesus, the distance is permanently erased, the curse is shattered, and the heavy silence of death is replaced by an unbreakable, eternal covenant of grace. ••

R This brings us to the core conviction of our text. This is the truth that must grip your soul today. • Cling to the Covenant Companion who has overcome all bitter despair. • When the darkness closes in, do not look to your own strength. Look to the one who stands alongside you. ••

R How then does this gospel reality change the way we live tomorrow morning? • Let's apply the text together. ••

## Application for believers

Å Do you know where bitterness started for Naomi? • When God gave her Ruth in the midst of her circumstance, and instead of being grateful she chose to walk alongside her in silence. Stewing in her own pain. Functionally blind. Sitting in the ash heap of her circumstances. Weeping over what was lost. ●●

∩ What I'm about to say isn't intended to wound you. • You look at your crumbling marriage, your straining finances, your fading health, and you conclude that you are utterly alone. • That is bitter self-pity. And it is sin. • It is a lie. Why do you look at the ruins instead of the Redeemer? • Repent of spiritual blindness today. Confess the pride that tells you your pain goes unnoticed by God when His Covenant Companion stands directly beside you. He does not watch your suffering from a distance. He walks through the ruins of this life with you. ●●

R Stop staring at the wreckage. Deliberately fix your eyes on Jesus. He is the sovereignly provided companion for your soul. • Will you trust His presence, or will you coddle your despair? ●●

## Application for unbelievers

∂ Human logic has failed you. You have built a fortress out of your own intellect, your achievements, and your human securities. You believe you can think your way out of despair. You believe you can secure your own future. ●●

∂ It is an illusion. Your securities are shifting sand. Your human logic is a dead end. • Look at your life honestly. You are drifting. You are empty. The bitter despair of this fallen world is closing in, and your hands are slipping. • Abandon false securities today. Drop the prideful arguments. They cannot save you from the judgment you deserve. ●●

∩ I plead with you. Cast your bankrupt soul entirely upon Jesus Christ. He is not a theory. He is the Covenant Companion. • His self-sacrificial blood is your only lifeline. Not your effort. Not your performance. Not your logic. Christ alone. ●●

∩ Will you perish in your pride, or will you bow the knee to the one who can rescue you? • Turn to Him now. Let go of the sand, and grab the lifeline. ●●●

## Conclusion

R I have drunk deeply from the cup of bitterness. But I have discovered an antidote to this soul poison. When the world crumbles, I cling to the Covenant Companion who has overcome all bitter despair.

R We have watched this dark narrative unfold. We saw the ruin of human logic drive a family into enemy territory. We witnessed the separation of the heart as grief fractured a home. We stood amazed at the climax of sovereign devotion in Ruth's radical vow. Yet, we wincing at the blindness of bitter despair as Naomi returned empty. But God did not leave her there. We closed with the dawn of providential hope at the beginning of the barley harvest.

^ To the believer caught in self-pity. Repent of your functional blindness, open your eyes, and look at the Savior walking beside you through the ruins.

^ To the unbeliever clinging to worldly security. Abandon your bankrupt logic today, drop your pride, and cast your soul entirely upon the life-giving blood of Jesus Christ.

^ When you look up from the ruins of this world, you do not find emptiness. You find Him.

^ Amen.

**Close in prayer**

**Benediction**

## Homiletic indicators

- The operative word in the sentence is underlined.
- R – Instruction
  - **Body:** Natural, one hand gestures.
  - **Voice:** measured, firm.
- ^ – Unction
  - **Body:** Forward, expressive.
  - **Voice:** Raised, faster.
- ð – Fear
  - **Body:** Narrow eyes, still shoulders, lift your chin slightly (exposed posture).
  - **Voice:** Breathily, higher pitch, quick shallow breaths. Speak into the back of the throat.
- O' – Anger
  - **Body:** Jaw forward, stable feet (no shifting weight), sharp hand strikes (karate chop motion).
  - **Voice:** Hard attack on consonants. Drop pitch slightly, but increase volume on key syllables. Staccato.
- P – Happiness
  - **Body:** Relax shoulders, soften the brow. Open palms, wider stance.
  - **Voice:** Rise in melody at the end of phrases. Bright, forward resonance (smile while speaking).
- Å – Sadness
  - **Body:** Heavy eyelids, slight forward slump, hands still or clasped low.
  - **Voice:** Lower volume, monotone descent (each phrase ends lower than it started). Use mostly single-syllable words.
- □ – Disgust
  - **Body:** Wrinkle nose, pull back your head, sharp turning away from the pulpit.
  - **Voice:** Nasal, sharp, with a "negation cadence" (rising then falling sharply on the sin's name). Hard glottal stops.
- ๓ – Surprise
  - **Body:** Eyebrows up, slight backward step or open-mouth inhale.
  - **Voice:** Bright, high onset. Use a sudden upward interval (a leap in pitch on the unexpected word).
- ● – Pause
  - **What it does:** Allows the last sentence to land, convict.
  - **Length:** 1 second (colon), 2 seconds (period), 3+ seconds (after a weighty statement).
  - **Body:** Stop moving. Hold eye contact. Do not smile or nod. Let the silence be uncomfortable.
  - **Delivery note:** A pause feels longer to you than to them. Trust it. Hold one more beat than you think is comfortable.

## The setting (Ruth 1:1-5): A human scheme leads to death and disaster.

<sup>1</sup> During the time of the judges [a time of spiritual anarchy], there was a famine [period of covenantal judgement] in the land. A man left Bethlehem in Judah [Lit: House of Bread in Praise] with his wife and two sons to stay in the territory of Moab [historical enemy, between 50-120kms away] for a while [note the intention was brevity]. <sup>2</sup> The man's name was Elimelech [Lit: My God is King], and his wife's name was Naomi [Lit: Pleasant]. The names of his two sons were Mahlon [Lit: Sickly] and Chilion [Lit: Vanishing]. They were Ephrathites from Bethlehem in Judah. They entered the fields of Moab and settled there. <sup>3</sup> Naomi's husband, Elimelech, died, and she was left with her two sons. <sup>4</sup> Her sons took Moabite women as their wives: one was named Orpah [Lit: Back of the Neck] and the second was named Ruth [Lit: Companion]. After they lived in Moab for about ten years [note the compromise or complacency], <sup>5</sup> both Mahlon and Chilion also died, and the woman was left without her two children and without her husband [Naomi is left old, barren, and empty].

The story happens during the time of the judges. A family goes to Moab, to stay for a while, but end up remaining for ten years. A famine in the land of Naomi, with Bethlehem in Judah drives the family to the Moab where the boys marry Orpah and Ruth before dying.

## The rising tension (Ruth 1:6-15): Orpah goes back to her people and gods, while Ruth clings to Naomi.

<sup>6</sup> She and her daughters-in-law set out to return from the territory of Moab, because she had heard in Moab that the Lord [Yah-weh] had paid attention [Lit: Visited, a intervened in human history to alter circumstances] to his people's need by providing them with food. [The time of the Judges] <sup>7</sup> She left the place where she had been living, accompanied by her two daughters-in-law, and travelled along the road leading back to the land of Judah [between 50-120kms away].

Ten years later the woman set out to return. They head from the territory of Moab taking the road back to their people and to the land of Judah. Naomi encourages Ruth and Orpah to go leading back to the land of gods.

<sup>8</sup> Naomi said to them, 'Each of you go back to your mother's home. May the Lord [Yah-weh] show kindness to you as you have shown to the dead and to me. <sup>9</sup> May the Lord [Yah-weh] grant each of you rest in the house of a new husband.' She kissed them, and they wept loudly.

<sup>10</sup> They said to her, 'We insist on returning with you to your people.'

<sup>11</sup> But Naomi replied, 'Return home, my daughters. Why do you want to go with me? Am I able to have any more sons who could become your husbands? <sup>12</sup> Return home, my daughters. Go on, for I am too old to have another husband. Even if I thought there was still hope for me to have a husband tonight and to bear sons, <sup>13</sup> would you be willing to wait for them to grow up [Levirate marriage in Deuteronomy 25:5-6]? Would you restrain yourselves from remarrying? No, my daughters, my life is much too bitter for you to share [in Israel they would be impoverished, foreign, childless widows], because the Lord's [Yah-weh] hand has turned against me [lament against a sovereign, personal God].' <sup>14</sup> Again they wept loudly, and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung [Genesis 2:24, a husband cleaves to his wife, covenantal bond] to her. <sup>15</sup> Naomi said, 'Look, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods [Geography, community, religion]. Follow your sister-in-law.'

The climax (Ruth 1:16-17): Ruth makes a covenantal vow to Naomi in life and death.

<sup>16</sup> But Ruth replied [sounds like a covenantal vow]:

a1.) Don't plead	with me	to abandon you
a2.) or to return	and not follow you.	
b1.) For wherever	you go,	I will go, [Geographic parallelism]
b2.) and wherever	you live,	I will live;
c1.) your people	will be my people,	[Community parallelism]
c2.) and your God	will be my God.	[Religious parallelism, god's ties to territories, switching allegiance]
d1.) <sup>17</sup> Where	you die,	I will die, [Destiny parallelism]
d2.) and there	I will be buried.	[choosing permanent exile, cutting all ties with homeland]
e1.) May the Lord punish me,	and do so severely,	[Oath to the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob mimicking marriage]
e2.) if anything but death	separates you and me.	[I'm not coming for a husband, I'm coming for you]

The falling action (Ruth 1:18-21): They arrive in Bethlehem, where Naomi is bitter rather than joyful.

<sup>18</sup> When Naomi saw that Ruth was determined to go with her, she stopped talking to her. [the journey back is marked by heavy, unresolved silence between the two women]

<sup>19</sup> The two of them travelled until they came to Bethlehem. When they entered Bethlehem, the whole town was excited about their arrival and the local women exclaimed, 'Can this be Naomi?' [shock of physical transformation]

<sup>20</sup> 'Don't call me Naomi. Call me Mara [Lit: Bitterness],' she answered, 'for the Almighty has made me very bitter. <sup>21</sup> I went away full, but the Lord [Yah-weh] has brought me back empty. Why do you call me Naomi, since the Lord [Yah-weh] has opposed me [courtroom metaphor], and the Almighty has afflicted me?'

After Ruth's vow, Naomi and her walk back in silence. They take the road leading back to the land of Judah and arrive at Bethlehem. Naomi and Ruth came to Bethlehem where the local woman are excited and ask, Can this be Naomi?

The new setting (Ruth 1:22): Their arrival in Bethlehem coincides with the beginning of the harvest.

<sup>22</sup> So Naomi [Lit: Pleasant, but now calling herself bitter] came back from the territory of Moab [representing separation from God] with her daughter-in-law Ruth [Lit: Companion] the Moabitess [but now a covenantal companion]. They arrived in Bethlehem at the beginning of the barley harvest [providentially at the time of plenty].

The story concludes at the beginning of the barley harvest. The story arcs from the territory of Moab to Bethlehem. Naomi and Ruth arrive at the beginning of the barley harvest.

**This is how I use colour highlighting:**

- **Orange**: structure indicator, conjunctions, and prepositions.
- **Pink**: Time.
- **Green**: Location.
- **Blue**: Character.
- **Yellow**: Commentary reference.
- **Red**: repeated words.

# Sermon preparation worksheet

## Passage: Ruth 1

### 1. How has the author organised this passage? a) An outline, b) Tools, c) The emphasis.

- a) 1) Descent toward death: A human scheme leads to death and disaster (Ruth 1:1-5).
  - 2) Debate on the road: Orpah goes back to her people and gods, while Ruth clings to Naomi (Ruth 1:6-15).
  - 3) Covenantal commitment: Ruth makes a covenantal vow to Naomi in life and death (Ruth 1:16-17).
  - 4) Bitter arrival: They arrive in Bethlehem, where Naomi is bitter rather than joyful (Ruth 1:18-21).
  - 5) Providential twist: Their arrival in Bethlehem coincides with the beginning of the harvest (Ruth 1:22).
- b) Ruth 1 is narrative, containing discourse and poetry. I considered how the scenes developed (noting the change in time, location, and characters) which revealed a plot arc. The climax is the poetic covenantal vow made Ruth.
- c) The Lord provides a loyal companion to preserve a dead line when human logic says all hope is lost.

### 2. How does the context inform the meaning of this passage? a) Literary, b) Historical, c) Cultural, d) Biblical.

- a) Ruth 1 is the bleak prologue to the book's narrative arc. The pit from which the rest of the story climbs. Naomi stands in the gates of Bethlehem declaring distress, while ignoring the faithful daughter-in-law standing by her side. In Ruth 2, fortunes are reversed as Boaz, the kingsman redeemer is introduced, and the land is described as full of harvest. This matters because, Naomi's grief has blinded her to reality. Her companion in Ruth 1 is God's blessing in Ruth 2. Human logic has miscalculated the situation. Providential hope stands alongside her.
- b) Ruth 1 is written in the days when the judges ruled, characterised by recurring cycles of idolatry, civil war, foreign oppression, and ethical anarchy, where everyone did what was right in his own eyes. The famine that struck Bethlehem was the signature historical manifestation of covenantal judgment (Deuteronomy 28:15-24). This matters because, Elimelech's decision to abandon the land of promise for the fields of Moab pictures faithless human logic prioritising temporary physical survival over permanent covenantal fidelity. God uses a foreign outsider to introduce the very loyal devotion that will rescue Israel by birthing the Davidic line.
- c) Ancient Near Eastern culture was patriarchal, tribal, and agrarian. A woman's economic security, legal standing, social identity, and physical protection were contingent upon her relationship to a living male, either a father, a husband, or a son (Deuteronomy 25:5-6). A childless widow was the lowest social rung, facing a death by destitution. This matters because, human logic dictated Ruth follow Orpah back to the security of her mother's house to secure a husband. Choosing to cling to an old, barren widow, Ruth was culturally signing her own economic death warrant. Ruth's devotion was self-sacrificial. She was not coming to Israel to get a husband, she was coming to be Naomi's lifeline.
- d) Moab was Israel's incestuous (Genesis 19) enemy, explicitly excluded from entering the assembly (Deuteronomy 23:3-6). This matters because, the biological insider, Elimelech (My God is King), abandoned the House of Bread lacking faith in his King, resulting in death. Conversely, the biblical outsider, a cursed Moabitess, abandons her homeland, cleaves to a bankrupt widow, swearing a oath to Yahweh. Ruth's vow to cling to Naomi alludes to Genesis 2:24. The word is used for a husband cleaving to his wife, and in Deuteronomy 10:20 for Israel cleaving to Yahweh. This matters because, it demonstrates that God's sovereign provision and covenantal faithfulness crosses enemy lines, overwrites historical curses, and uses pagan converts to shame the faithlessness of Israel, preserving the lineage of the Messiah.

### 3. What is the main point the author is arguing to his audience?

The Lord provides a covenant companion to overcome bitter despair.

### 4. How does this passage connect to the gospel of Jesus Christ?

We are like Naomi. Wilfully alienated in a pagan land. Spiritually bankrupt. Justly crushed under the weight of covenantal judgment. Ephesians 2:12-13 describes our condition as being far away, excluded from citizenship, and without a hope in the world. And, like Ruth, the sovereign Lord has provided an unexpected, self-sacrificial covenant companion, who was a cursed outsider, and binds themselves to us in life and death. Jesus did not leave us in our exile. He crossed enemy lines, entered our ruin, and did not merely accompany us in our misery but took our bitter judgment upon himself with his own blood. Now in Christ Jesus, you who were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ. Through Jesus, the ultimate covenant companion, distance is erased, curse is broken, and bitter despair is overwritten by an unbreakable, eternal covenant of grace.

### 5. What is the main point you will argue to your audience?

Cling to the Covenant Companion who has overcome all bitter despair.

### 6. What applications will you make? a) To believers, b) To unbelievers.

- a) Repent of functional blindness by confessing bitter self-pity that ignores God's provision standing beside you. Deliberately fix your eyes on Jesus, who is the sovereignly provided companion who walks alongside you through the ruins of this world.
- b) Abandon your faithless human logic, and false securities you cling to. Cast your bankrupt soul entirely upon the self-sacrificial blood of Jesus Christ who is your only lifeline.

### 7. What is your sermon title and your preaching outline? a) Sermon outline, b) Sermon title.

b) Bitterness blinds

- a) 1) The ruin of human logic (Ruth 1:1-5)
- 2) The separation of the heart (Ruth 1:6-15)
- 3) The climax of sovereign devotion (Ruth 1:16-17)
- 4) The blindness of bitter despair (Ruth 1:18-21)
- 5) The dawn of providential hope (Ruth 1:22)

**On my sermon preparation sheet, these are the questions and an explanation:**

**1. How has the author organised this passage?**

- a) An outline: The author's organization (or structure) is a way of talking about the shape or form of a biblical passage. Beneath the surface of each passage is an underlying arrangement of material and a logic that the author has used to organize the passage. And each part of the passage has a role to play in that structure.
- b) Tools: Identify the text type, and any grammatical tools used to identify the structure.
- c) The emphasis: The structure will reveal an emphasis that the author is making.

**2. How does the context inform the meaning of this passage?**

- a) Literary context: How do the passage that comes before and the passage that comes after relate to your passage?
- b) Historical context: The historical situation or circumstances experienced by the first audience at the time when the book was written.
- c) Cultural context: The setting in the daily life of the people/characters in the book and how that will have been understood by the first audience. This is distinct from historical context in that it does not relate to a particular audience in a particular place at a particular time, but the details of life that the people/characters in the text had in common. Anything that requires extra-biblical knowledge should be treated skeptically.
- d) Biblical context: Is the author citing or alluding to some previously written Biblical passage? What connections could the author have reasonably expected his first audience to make.

**3. What is the main point the author is arguing to his audience?**

The author's main point is a way of talking about the aim of a passage as a whole. It can be descriptive or prescriptive. It is not simply a summary statement. But rather, it is the idea of which the author is trying to persuade his audience. As you work on articulating the author's argument, please keep in mind that it needs to be specific enough to the passage that it clearly comes from the particular passage (and not any other passage), it is for the first audience, it should be one single sentence that is both short and clear, and captures the argument of the passage.

**4. How does this passage connect to the gospel of Jesus Christ?**

What part of the gospel (the death and resurrection of Christ) is in view? Every part of the Bible, every passage of Scripture, in some way relates to the gospel of Jesus Christ. What parts of the passage connect to the gospel? The connection must be legitimate and textually driven.

**5. What is the main point you will argue to your audience?**

**6. What applications will you make? a) To believers, b) To unbelievers.**

The main point of a sermon is the fundamental statement of what you, as a speaker today, are trying to convince your audience today. It will certainly be intimately related to the author's main point for his original audience and it will consider the gospel connection. It should be well reasoned and, perhaps, articulated as the result of proof (so depending on premises and building arguments).

**7. What is your sermon title and your preaching outline? a) Sermon outline, b) Sermon title.**

**On my sermon preparation sheet, this is how questions relate to one another:**

- o 1 a) should be driven by the text.
- o 1 c) should be driven from the outline in 1 a).
- o 2) should be directly relevant to 1 c).
- o 3) cannot be disconnected from 1 c), and should be clarified by 2).
- o 4) must be found in the text.
- o 5) cannot be disconnected from 3), and should be driven by 4).
- o 6) should flow from 5).
- o 7) should structurally relate to 1 a), and make the argument in 5).